

**Statement to the Economic Affairs Interim Committee**

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Missoula Partners for Reintegration (PFR)

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee

I represent Missoula Partners for Reintegration, a community reentry coalition of providers, agencies returning citizens and community members. We are in full support of the study of occupational licensing restrictions, and we ask that you allocate sufficient staff time to determine how restrictions on those with felony records may be barriers to meeting Montana's need for workers in all occupations. Licensing boards need guidance and transparent procedures so that vague criteria such as "public health and safety" and "good moral character" are not used to deny licensure without evidence except a felony record, no matter how old.

Montana has a continuing worker shortage, yet at least 40,000 Montana citizens have felony records\* and may be effectively prevented from pursuing training and gainful employment. This is a significant number, and a far too high proportion of those citizens will be Native Americans, who experience mass incarceration in relation to their numbers. Licensing restrictions may sentence returning citizens to low-wage jobs and increase the risk of recidivism.

We ask that the Committee ensure that all state licensing boards have a standard, clear, transparent process for making decisions about individuals with prior felony records who have successfully rehabilitated, who are living as responsible citizens, and have the appropriate training. Montana's Constitution Article II.28.02 states that "Full rights are restored by termination of state supervision for any offense against the state."

Thank for allowing me to speak to you.

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\* Shannon et al, "The Growth, Scope, and Spatial Distribution of People with Felony Records in the United States, 1948–2010." (2017), *Demography*, 54, 5, pp. 1795-1818.